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ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged that programs to prepare administrators for their roles are inadequate and are not designed with coming changes in education in mind. States must take responsibility for changing preparation programs to meet these challenges. Much of the discussion about preparation programs centers on the knowledge base administrators need. Translating that knowledge base into an administrator preparation program is difficult. Many have proposed a practice-oriented, problem-based approach to administrator preparation. Several states have initiated reforms to respond to these changing needs in administrator preparation. In the mid 1980s, California reformed its administrator requirements. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing surveyed 2,500 individuals on the content and structure of administrator preparation programs, professional development experiences, and other credentialing policies. Respondents identified several major concerns for future administrators: cultural diversity, resources and fiscal concerns, school restructuring, staffing, management, leadership, academic preparation, community responsiveness, social issues, and civic and political leadership. Concerns in administrator preparation included recruitment, academics, broad skills, early clinical experiences and mentoring, broad preparation and development, and ongoing education. (Contains 19 references.) (JPT)

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Preparing Future Administrators: Stakeholder Perceptions

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Preparing Future Administrators: Stakeholder Perceptions

Abstract. This paper describes a study of stakeholder perceptions about preparing administrators for schools of the future. Two questions were probed in focused group settings: 1) What are the most important issues that need to be addressed by school administrators in the next ten years? 2) How do we best prepare school leaders to meet these challenges? A summary of the discussions is presented and the work is set within the broader context of the reform of administrative preparation and professional development in California.

Many are struggling with the question of how to best prepare future administrators to lead the schools of tomorrow. The National Governors' Association (1990) captured this sentiment in its call for reform to preparation programs and the establishment of new standards at the state level for the licensure of school administrators.

> The inadequacy of programs to prepare principals and school superintendents is widely acknowledged; current programs offer administrators little grounding either in cognition and learning or in modern principles of leadership and management. Working with education, business, and community leaders, states must design a system for licensure based on what school administrators will need in order to lead, manage and succeed in a restructured school system (National Governors' Association, 1990).

The principal is probably the most publicly visible of school administrators, the leader that impacts the daily lives of students more than any other administrator. Therefore, most of the public discussion related to school administration tends to focus on this key leadership role. As the National Commission for the Principalship states:

> From the broad ranging debates on schooling today, a few areas of consensus can be found. One of these involves the

> principalship. Most observers agree that, (1) the principal plays a key role in determining school effectiveness, and (2) traditional preparation and state certification programs fail to anticipate the demands placed upon principals in our changing schools (1990, p. 1).

It is much easier to find support for the idea that new expectations for schools and school leadership demand changes in administrative preparation and ongoing professional development than to reach agreement about the direction of the needed changes. At the heart of these discussions, however, is a fervent debate about defining the appropriate knowledge base for the profession (Barnett, et al, 1992; Foster, 1986; Hallinger & Wimpelberg, 1989; Nicolaides & Gaynor, 1989).

The knowledge base represents the underlying assumptions about what is it that administrators ought to know and be able to do. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration defines it in the following terms:

> The knowledge and skill base of a profession should provide a platform for practice. It also must address core professional responsibilities so that persons qualifying for practice can fulfill the essential tasks of the profession in various contexts (1993, p. ix).

Defining the knowledge base is only one part of the consideration of what is needed to prepare thoughtful, effective educational leaders for tomorrow's schools. Translating that knowledge base into the plans to develop school administrators becomes even more difficult. Increasingly, the literature indicates that the knowledge base underlying programs for administrators is so vast and complex, that attempting to "package" this entire knowledge base into preservice preparation programs becomes a futile effort (National Commission for the Principalship, 1990; Hallinger & Wimpleberg, 1989). Also, it is difficult for students to assimilate and think about applying knowledge to their actual practice until they have gained some experience (Anderson, 1991; Barnett, et al., 1992; Daresh & LaPlant, 1985). The rapid growth of a variety of professional growth opportunities and increased

participation of school administrators in such activities raises issues about the content and appropriate role of these programs and activities. Even if the appropriate knowledge base is defined, how is this content most effectively arranged, sequenced, presented, delivered, and assessed?

What is increasingly clear is the need to reexamine the knowledge base for educational administration and the way it gets translated into the content and structure of professional preparation, induction, and ongoing professional growth experiences for school administrators. As Griffiths and his colleagues suggest:

> Departments of educational administration are in need of structural and disciplinary adjustments. Most adjustments concern building and incorporating a knowledge base of administrator preparation. In addition, the intellectual climate of departments requires rejuvenation for both professors and students (1988, p. 302).

In this debate, considerable support is being generated for a "practice-oriented, problem-based" approach (Murphy, 1992) to administrative preparation. Many observers have suggested that a curriculum for school administrators, given the nature of the job, should be "issues based" or organized around a set of problems that administrators face on a daily basis (Bridges, 1989). Silver (1978) argues for a "learning-in-action" approach, which would incorporate opportunities for administrators to grow and learn as they reflect on their own practice. The National Commission for the Principalship (1990) has posed a new framework for the preparation of principals "based on the realities of the workplace" (p.17).

It is this commitment to defining an appropriate and functional knowledge base and translating it into administrative preparation that underlies the present work.

Study of the California Credential Structure

In response to many calls for reform, a number of states have adopted a variety of credential reforms in the past decade. These reforms have been initiated to be more responsive to the needs of school of tomorrow and to recognize the increased demands and complexity of school leadership. Reforms have included such measures as changing the structure and the content of administrator preparation programs leading to state certification, mandating assessments for initial certification or continued employment of school administrators, and adding requirements for continued professional development (Murphy, 1990).

California instituted significant reforms in the credential requirements in the mid 1980's, instituting a two-level credential and defining broad competency domains or content areas to be included at each level. College and university programs are approved by the Commission and reviewed by teams of educators on a regular basis to determine how well they meet the extent to which they meet standards of program quality. Until recently, however, no comprehensive examination of the implementation of the new administrative service credential requirements had been conducted.

A recent study of the current structure was conducted by the Commission (Bartell & Birch, 1993). The purpose of the study was to examine both the content and structure of admistrator preparation programs, professional development experiences, and other credentialing policies for school administrators, and to make recommendations for needed changes. The research was conducted over a two year period under the advisement of a panel of twenty-five members with expertise in the field of school administration. Approximately 2500 individuals responded to surveys or participated in focused group activities as a part of this study. The research also included extensive document review and a careful examination of the reform literature related to administrative preparation.

The following discussion focuses on one part of this recent study of administrator preparation. This portion of the study built on the premise that the content of preparation and professional development programs for

school administrators should be grounded in the practice of the profession and the underlying issues and concerns to be addressed by administrators of the future.

Focused Groups: The Design

Focused groups are often used by market researchers to explore consumers' reactions to products. They can also be used to resolve problems or pursue a variety of issues and ideas. Participants discuss feelings and beliefs about issues in group settings, which offer a dynamic environments to probe stakeholders' perspectives and to test a researcher's understanding. In using this process, key informants are assembled to identify problems or propose solutions. Such groups may be assembled especially for a particular discussion, or may be an already constituted group. The interaction of participants provides a unique source of information and serves to check the validity of one another's reactions (Moore, 1987).

Focused groups can also be used in qualitative research. Grouping of participants allows for quicker data collection than does individual interviews, although observations are not independent. What one member of a group says affects the reactions of others. Focused groups can be used in exploratory research, or to help define the scope of the problem or issue to be examined. Information collected through this approach is often supplemented with other forms of data collection. The number of focused groups necessary for confidence in the results of this technique depends on the purpose of the activity and the degree of consensus of participants.

In this instance, focused groups were used to explore targeted group reactions to some open-ended questions related to the preparation of school administrators. Two questions were used as a basis for focused group discussions for this study.

> Question 1: What are the most important issues that need to be addressed by school administrators in the next ten years?
> Question 2: How do we best prepare school leaders to meet these challenges?

Members of the administrator preparation advisory panel who had been appointed to guide the overall direction of the study were asked to assist with the collection of data in focused groups. This involvement of panelists as data collectors had the effect of actively involving them more directly in the research efforts and gave them an opportunity to interact with others about the key issues being explored. Panel members who chose to participate served as group discussion leaders, or moderators, and were assigned to work with particular groups. In some cases, two panel members worked together and one served as a recorder.

Panel members were trained for their roles as discussion leaders. As a part of this training, a full 90 minute focused discussion was held, in which eight panel members served as participants. Following this demonstration, which was observed by the remaining members of the panel, all the participants analyzed the techniques of conducting focused groups.

The moderator's task was to get participants to focus on the questions being considered, without injecting his/her own particular point of view. The moderator allowed participants to respond in their own terms, and used probes to elicit more specific information.

Eight to twelve participants per group were suggested. Purposive rather than representative sampling was used; group members were invited rather than being selected randomly. Discussion leaders were encouraged to invite persons to participate who would be knowledgeable about current issues and problems facing schools today and the role that administrators can play in addressing those problems.

One-hundred and sixty-one persons participated in nineteen focused group discussions between September and December of 1991. The groups were representative of a wide variety of stakeholders, including higher educators, administrators, teachers, parents, school board members, and other persons serving in key leadership roles in schools, .

Panel members serving as discussion leaders were given specific directions about how to conduct the sessions and to record information generated in these sessions. The first question was addressed using a structured approach known as the Nominal Group Technique (McKillip, 1987). This approach begins with a the generation of a listing of responses and then requires groups to reach consensus on the top five through a ranking procedure. The second question was addressed with a more traditional open-ended focused group approach. However, the top five ranking issues became the focus of the group's discussion for the second question. Specific time limits were suggested for both questions.

Both approaches were demonstrated in the training session. Discussion leaders were also directed to follow the same note-taking and data reporting procedures. Standardized forms were used for recording ideas generated in the focused group discussions so that the data would be reported in a consistent manner.

Data Analysis

Comparative analysis procedures were used with the qualitative data (Glaser, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1984). The notes submitted by the focused group discussion leader had all been entered in the same format. These notes were reviewed element by element, and as each new element was encountered, it was entered on a master list. Judgments were made about the comparability one element to another. These individual elements were then classified into major thematic categories. Each individual element became a part of one overall thematic category.

Question number one was handled in a slightly different manner than question number two, because the data were collected and recorded in a slightly different way. In addressing question number one, groups were required to rank the top five issues or areas of concern from a long list of concerns which had been generated. Although the entire list of issues were submitted, only the top five were analyzed using the approach described above.

The analysis of question number one began with a listing of twenty-four issues or concerns that were collapsed into ten categories. The analyses of question number two began with a listing of eighty-seven different elements which were eventually classified into six major themes or categories.

Focused Group Discussion: Issues and Trends Identified

In this study, a wide range of stakeholders were consulted about the perceived needs of administrators for tomorrow's schools. The issues were defined and discussed in focused group sessions held around the state. Group members felt that the concerns identified should be incorporated into professional preparation programs or professional growth experiences as appropriate.

After an initial discussion, each group identified five major issues for consideration through a forced-ranking procedure. For purposes of analysis, the issues were grouped into the following major themes.

- cultural diversity
- resources and fiscal concerns
- restructuring and reforming schools
- staffing schools
- management of schools
- providing strong leadership
- strengthening academic preparation
- community responsiveness
- social issues
- civic and political leadership

The discussions related to each of these major areas is summarized in the following section. Discussion notes which identified all of the issues mentioned (in addition to the top five) were used to expand the understanding of each particular issue or set of issues. Although ideas were grouped into like areas and summarized, terms and phrases used in the notes were frequently used in order to reflect as closely as possible the meaning intended by the participants.

Cultural diversity. All groups gave significant attention to the changing demographics in California and the need to be attentive and responsive to an increasingly diverse student population. Fifteen of the groups listed the issue of cultural diversity among their top five choices, and every other group included the topic or related issues in their discussions.

Changing demographics in California have created a need for new and better ways to educate a growing and changing population of students. Children enter school from a wider variety of ethnic, cultural, language, and family backgrour ds than ever before. The traditional family structure is no longer dominant and gender expectations and responsibilities have changed. Schools need to better meet the needs of all students they serve and to better prepare all students to be members of a changed, multicultural society.

Resources and fiscal concerns. Schools are increasingly expected to serve increased numbers of more diverse students with a wider range of services than ever before. School facilities are rapidly deteriorating and becoming out-of-date. Yet, the financial resources are not available to meet these expanding numbers and needs. Schools are asked to do more with less. This calls for careful and creative management of existing resources and attention to the establishment of new resource bases.

In times of severe budget constraints, such as the one facing California at the present time, the resource and fiscal issues become even more crucial. With more fiscal responsibility and accountability being shifted to the site level under systems of site-based management, more administrators have increased responsibilities in this area.

Restructuring and reforming schools. The most recent reform efforts in schools have been focused on the restructuring of schools and the changing roles and responsibilities of those who work in schools. Alternative governance patterns and delivery systems are emerging. Administrators need to be prepared to lead and work in schools that may be very different than in the past. They need to learn to think in different ways, "outside of the lines" in the words of one discussion group.

Staffing schools. Staffing issues, broadly defined, were important to 11 of the groups. Schools are people-driven and are highly dependent upon the quality of the persons employed to work in them. Most emphasized the need to recruit, induct, evaluate, and encourage the growth and development of the best possible staff for schools of the future.

A special case was made for the necessity of giving attention to the teacher workforce. Teaching is becoming more difficult and complex than ever before, and expectations for all students are rising. It is important that school leaders identify, hire, nurture, evaluate, and promote those who are highly committed and best qualified to deliver a complex, challenging curriculum to students.

Another group focused on the need to move away from the adversarial nature of collective bargaining with employee groups. They called for finding new and better ways of working together.

Management of schools. Schools need to be managed in cost-effective, efficient and appropriate ways so that learning can take place. Part of a manager's role is to establish a positive school climate and assure a safe, well-run school environment so that teachers can teach and students can be successful.

Schools may need to be managed differently than in the past. School-based decision-making and accountability place new demands on site administrators. Organizational and structural patterns are changing. Administrative responsibility may be shared with teachers and other school personnel. Regardless of these changes, school leaders need to continue to be prepared to act in responsible, thoughtful ways so that schools can function in behalf of students.

Providing strong leadership. Changing schools and communities demand strong leadership. Such a leader is one who articulates a vision, establishes and pursues appropriate goals, and inspires confidence. A wide range of leadership skills were noted as being important to the problems faced by current schools, including the following:

- personnel or human relations skills
- decision making strategies
- facilitation skills
- conflict resolution skills
- communication skills
- ethical responsibility
- sensitivity
- ability to motivate others
- risk-taking
- accepting responsibility
- problem solving
- consensus building
- delegating

Strengthening curriculum/academic programs. Among their top five items, eight groups mentioned the need for strengthening the academic program and for maintaining curricular currency. Most recognized that the core task of schooling was the educating of students and that assuring that learning took place was the key responsibility of the administrator. Several groups focused on particular areas of the curriculum that needed to be strengthened, such as reading and language arts and technology. Most recognized that schools often labor under an out-of-date curriculum which does not prepare students well to take their place in modern day society.

Some groups indicated that administrators themselves need to keep up-to-date with current theory and practice in curriculum and instruction Others mentioned the need to be able to effectively assess student progress and evaluate curricular programs in order to make good decisions about the needs of students. Educational leaders must be knowledgeable about assessment techniques to monitor and verify the attainment of educational objectives.

Community responsiveness. Several groups mentioned the need for schools to be more responsive to diverse community and constituent groups, beginning with the parents of children in schools. Parents who are active and involved in schooling enhance their children's learning opportunities and

become the strongest supporters of their own schools. Parents want to be, according to one group, "full partners in the educational process."

All community groups have an interest and a stake in schools. Schools are a vital part of the fiber of a community and can serve as a force for bringing groups together in pursuit of common goals. School leaders need to tap these interests, communicate on behalf of their schools, and take community concerns back to their schools in reasonable, responsible ways.

Social issues. The need for school leaders to address a wide variety of social problems was frequently mentioned. One group pointed out that our schools are a reflection of society and the problems of society affect daily school life. Specific issues and concerns include the breakdown of the traditional family structure and support system, substance abuse, gang activity, violence, teen pregnancy, homelessness, and AIDS. As these problems become more acute, there is an increased need for coordination of children and family services. Schools, governments, and social service agencies must plan and work together to provide needed, coordinated services to children, youth, and families.

Others groups saw the need to give more attention for preparing students for a changing society and workplace. <u>All</u> students need to be prepared to be functioning, productive members of society. One group focused on the needs of special education students and others focused on those who are limited in their ability to speak English. Most recognized that a growing, more diverse student population in California has led to increased demands on schools and society.

Civic and political leadership. Schools operate within political and social contexts which cannot be ignored. School leaders need a thorough understanding of legal constraints on schooling and the policy arena governing their operation. School administrators need a better understanding of how they can lead in this area and be effective spokespersons on behalf of schools and children. They need to expand their civic and political leadership in the coming years to rally support from the community for school improvement. Business and community leaders

recognize, now more than ever, the need for quality schools to prepare a better, more educated workforce. This interest needs to be tapped and channeled in support of schools.

Focused Group Discussion Themes Related to Credential Domains

Table 1 presents a side-by-side comparison of the focused group discussion themes with the currently defined competency domains for both levels of credentialing in California (preliminary and professional). It should be noted that all of the issues defined in focus groups could be thought to generally fall within existing competency domains, either at the preliminary or professional level. However, the themes defined by the competency domains are broad enough to either include or exclude the areas of emphasis noted by the focused groups. For example, "organizational theory, planning an application," defined as a competency domain for the professional level could include issues related to the reform and restructuring of schools, or it could be entirely focused on theoretical models devoid of any discussion about current restructuring trends and issues.

Although the current curriculum of administrator preparation may potentially encompass all of the issues defined by the focused groups, responses confirmed the need to consider changes in the relative emphasis given to particular areas of concern. Additional findings in the larger study indicated that some areas are not well-addressed, or receive insufficient attention. One area that was identified in other portions of the larger study as being particularly weak was the area of cultural diversity. This area was consistently rated among the lowest in terms of perceived level of preparation by persons who had actually completed university programs (Bartell & Birch, 1993).

Table 1. Comparison of Preliminary and Professional Level Competency Areas with Focused Group Discussion Themes

Preliminary Level Competency Domains	Professional Level Competency Domains	Focus Group Discussion Themes
Educational Leadership	Instructional leadership	Providing strong leadership
	Organizational theory, planning, and application	Restructuring and reforming schools
Improvement in the Educational Program	Evaluation	Strengthening curriculum/academic programs
School Community Relations		Community Responsiveness
	Cultural and socio-economic diversity	Cultural diversity Social Issues
Legal and Financial Aspects	School law and political relationships	
Educational Governance and Politics		Civic and Political Leadership
Management of Educational Personnel	Professional and staff development	Management of schools
School Management	Management of human and material resources	Resources and fiscal concerns
	Fiscal management	

Advisory panel members examined the themes identified by the focused groups and classified these themes into two major categories: Changing Environment and Management and Leadership. The following statement was formulated by panel members on the basis of these discussions.

Administrators for the 21st century need to be effective managers and leaders who are able to operate successfully in a changing environment.

Preparation for the Challenges

An analysis of focused group discussion notes also provides some evidence of the need to think about different ways of preparing and introducing new administrators to their work responsibilities. The second question posed in these focused discussions was: How do we best prepare school leaders to meet these challenges?

Focused groups used the defined issues or areas of concern as a springboard for the second part of the discussion. A clear message emerged from an analysis of the group discussion notes: The traditional, purely academic pre-service preparation of school administrators is not adequate to the challenges presented.

Stakeholder groups recognized that academic preparation played an important role in preparing school administrators, but also realized that academic preparation in and of itself was not enough. New and more demanding educational challenges require a rethinking of preparation and ongoing professional growth opportunities for school administrators. We need to rethink the entire preparation and professional development stream for school administration, which is becoming an increasingly demanding and complex work, subject to an ever widening range of requirements, expectations, and pressures.

Six major themes were identified in the analysis of notes taken in focused group discussions related to this second question. When preparing future

administrators, more attention should be given to the following:

- Solid recruitment efforts
- A strong academic underpinning
- Emphasis on a broad range of skills
- An introduction to the job through clinical experiences and mentoring
- Multiple sources of preparation and development
- Expectations for ongoing professional development

Each of these themes is discussed in more detail below.

Solid recruitment efforts. Individuals typically self-select into administration, choosing to enroll in a preparation program at a university. More efforts should be made to identify potential administrators who possess some of the requisite skills needed to be an effective administrator, and who exhibit leadership ability in other contexts. Recruitment efforts should be broadly-based, and should attempt to identify a more diverse, change-oriented pool of potential administrators.

A strong academic underpinning. The value of academic preparation was not in dispute. Groups argued for high admission standards to university programs, rigorous coursework, and strong expectations for performance. Coursework should be thoroughly examined for its relevancy to current administrative practices and should reflect a good blend of theory, research, and practice. University professors should also update their own knowledge, skills, and awareness of current trends and issues important to schools.

Emphasis on a broad range of skills. The strong administrator would possess a wide range of skills and abilities, some of which include: leading, managing, motivating others, resolving conflict, consulting, facilitating, building consensus, adapting, counseling, providing a positive role model, empowering, questioning, envisioning, and conveying ideas orally and in writing. These skills should be recruited for, developed, nurtured, and fostered, and built upon.

An introduction to the job through clinical experiences and mentoring. The groups suggested clinical experiences that would include more opportunities for aspiring and beginning administrators to observe, critically examine, and reflect on administrative practice, learn more about the actual school and community context, gain experience in working with a wide variety of constituent groups, and be provided with appropriate feedback about his or her development. A variety of strategies for achieving this were noted, such as the use of case studies and simulation activities, meaningful field experiences simulating real administrative tasks, shadowing of experienced administrators, and field-based, action research activities. New administrators should be carefully and thoughtfully inducted into the profession, with a plan for mentoring job-relevant assistance and training.

Multiple sources of preparation and development. Aspiring and practicing administrators engage in a wide variety of activities that enhance their administrative practice and improve their understanding of schools. These activities may be sponsored by a number of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions. Many of these activities, some of which may not be based at the university, should have a formal role in the preparation and professional growth experiences of school administrators. Such programs may be incorporated in appropriate and meaningful ways into the individual's plan of preparation and professional development.

Expectations for ongoing professional development. Administrators can no longer be expected to be fully prepared for their responsibilities though a pre-service educational experience. They need to engage in reflective learning experiences as they enter the profession and be mentored and assisted in their initial induction experience. They must also be committed to becoming lifelong learners, and constantly upgrade, refine, and expand their own understandings. They need to keep abreast of new curricular developments and other reform efforts that impact schools.

Conclusions

The findings of this study were consistent with other findings in the larger study of administrative preparation, induction, and professional

development for California. All components of the study identified the need for a reorganization of both the content and structure of current preparation, induction, and professional development for future administrators. The credential structure is being revised to reflect the directions proposed by this study and the related work. The impending changes to credentialing requirements are consistent with this more practitioner-based approach.

The Commission on Teacher Credentialing has decided to retain a two-level credential structure and will add renewal requirements for professional service and professional growth in five year cycles. An appropriate and functional knowledge base will be defined for the entire professional preparation and development cycle, building on this research and other related work.

The new model proposes to significantly reform the advanced or professional level of preparation. This level of preparation will be restructured to be a formal induction period for new school administrators, begun only when a candidate obtains an administrative position. An individualized induction plan will be developed for each candidate and will include a mentoring component, professional development activities that may or may not be university-based, and academic coursework appropriate to the individual candidate's professional development needs and career plans. The candidate, a district supervisor or mentor, and a university supervisor will work together to develop this plan. All components of the plan will be under the umbrella of standards and criteria to be developed and approved by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the body charged with responsibility for the approval and review of programs for professional licensure.

This new design is intended to bridge the study and the practice of school administration in California and bring together all of the parties that have a stake in the preparation and development of the next generation of school leaders. Universities, school districts, and professional organizations will be encouraged to work together in new ways to implement this plan.

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